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Report of the Secretary-General on the Central African Republic

I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to Security Council resolution 2301 (2016), by which the Council renewed the mandate of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) until 15 November 2017 and requested me to report to the Council by 1 October 2016 and every four months thereafter. The report provides an update on major developments in the Central African Republic and the implementation of the mandate of MINUSCA since the issuance of my previous report (S/2016/824) on 29 September 2016.

II. Major developments

A. Political situation

2. The political environment was marred by rising tensions and outbreaks of violence, with an estimated 287 civilians killed in clashes between armed groups and a resurgence in crime partly linked to the onset of the dry season and seasonal migration. The tensions were exacerbated by the absence of tangible progress in tackling the root causes of the conflict and the posturing of armed group leaders seeking to strengthen their negotiating positions in view of continuing talks on disarmament, demobilization, reintegration and repatriation and parallel mediation initiatives by regional actors. The resurgent violence undermined government efforts to re-establish State authority, just as the successful Brussels Conference for the Central African Republic, held on 17 November 2016, raised popular expectations that the generous pledges would help to address the country's acute needs. The agreement between the Government and most armed groups on the strategy on disarmament, demobilization and reintegration, together with the adoption of a national security policy and an internal security forces development plan, represented important steps accepted by most Central African stakeholders, although not by all armed groups.

3. The President, Faustin Archange Touadera, continued to reach out to all actors to encourage them to pursue peace and reconciliation through dialogue. On

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12 October, he convened the first meeting of the Consultative Follow-up Committee on Disarmament, Demobilization, Reintegration and Repatriation, which was attended by 11 of the 14 main armed groups. The Front populaire pour la renaissance de la Centrafrique (FPRC), Maxime Mokom's anti-balaka group and the Retour, réclamation, réhabilitation (3R) group boycotted the process, although the last-mentioned later joined the Committee. Following the outbreak of violence in Kaga Bandoro between ex-Séléka and anti-balaka groups on 12 October, the President travelled with my Special Representative to the area and met a wide range of actors, including armed group representatives. While delivering a message of peace, he underscored that those responsible for the violence would be held accountable.

4. Efforts to reunite the ex-Séléka continued. The movement held a general assembly on 18 and 19 October in Bria, with the participation of FPRC, the Rassemblement patriotique pour le renouveau de la Centrafrique (RPRC) and dissidents from the Union pour la paix en Centrafrique (UPC). At the assembly, RPRC agreed to join ranks under a unified command led by the FPRC first vice-president, Noureddine Adam. The Mouvement patriotique pour la Centrafrique (MPC) and UPC boycotted the event. In the assembly's final declaration, the participants called for dialogue with the Government and expressed the group's intention to exercise authority in areas under its control. The Organization of Islamic Cooperation subsequently convened a meeting in Sido, Chad, on 30 and 31 October, during which it discussed with representatives of FPRC, MPC and RPRC possible approaches in negotiating with the Government. UPC rebuffed the invitation to attend the meeting. The UPC refusal to join the ranks of the FPRC coalition and its expansion in the east sparked clashes between the two groups in Ouaka and Haute-Kotto prefectures.

5. The political situation in Bangui, although generally calm, was affected by violent demonstrations on 24 October. Subsequently, on 28 October, the President met representatives of civil society, political parties, the private sector and the religious platform. During the meeting, which was aired live by local media, he called for political dialogue and for Central Africans to recognize the inability of the military and the security forces to fully discharge their responsibilities, stressing the need for comprehensive security sector reform. Meanwhile, on 24 November, the Kwa Na Kwa political party released a statement by the former President, François Bozizé, in which he announced his intention to return to the country to pursue inclusive dialogue and reconciliation.

6. The then Deputy Secretary-General visited the country from 1 to 3 November to raise international awareness ahead of the Brussels Conference. He and the President addressed the Consultative Follow-up Committee on Disarmament, Demobilization, Reintegration and Repatriation and emphasized that that forum represented the sole national platform for political dialogue and addressing the grievances of the armed groups. This paved the way for the Committee's adoption of the national disarmament, demobilization, reintegration and repatriation strategy on 3 November and its approval the following day at the first meeting of the Strategic Committee for Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration and Security Sector Reform, chaired by the President. The Strategic Committee also approved the national security policy and the five-year capacity-building and development plan for the police and the gendarmerie.

7. The Brussels Conference represented a demonstration of the international community's commitment to the country, with more than $2.2 billion pledged in support of the National Recovery and Peacebuilding Plan. The pledges amounted to some 70 per cent of the funding required for the five years of the Plan. The Conference also witnessed the signature by the President and the then Deputy Secretary-General of the Mutual Engagement Framework, which will serve as a mechanism for continued high-level political engagement between the country and the international community.

8. The National Assembly held its ordinary session from 1 October to 31 December, during which it convened hearings with key ministers on the Government's strategy on security and efforts to combat impunity. On 9 November, it adopted a law on gender parity aimed at achieving a 35 per cent quota for women in decision-making structures. On 28 and 29 December, it adopted the national budget for 2017, amounting to 237 billion CFA francs ($384,518,280), established its internal rules of procedure and passed legislation establishing a constitutional court and a high court. The Assembly convened an extraordinary session from 3 to 17 January during which it adopted legislation on the formation of the remaining institutions enshrined in the Constitution, including an economic and social council, a national mediation council, a high council for communication and a high committee on good governance. The holding of the election for the remaining unfilled seat in the Assembly, in the constituency of Bimbo 1, a suburb of Bangui, on 4 December completed the Assembly's composition.

9. The President continued to reach out to his counterparts in the region and visited Angola, Burkina Faso, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Gabon and the Sudan, where he sought support for his Government's efforts. He also attended meetings with the Board of Governors of the African Development Bank and the sixteenth Summit of la Francophonie, held in Madagascar from 22 to 27 November 2016.

10. On 30 November, the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) held the eighth extraordinary session of the Conference of Heads of State and Government, in Libreville. The participants expressed support for an African Union-led mediation initiative, in coordination with ECCAS, the United Nations and bilateral and multilateral partners, between the Government and the armed groups. In the communiqué adopted, the armed groups were called upon to lay down their weapons and join the disarmament, demobilization, reintegration and repatriation process initiated by the President.

B. Security situation

11. The reporting period saw surges in violence, including sporadic incidents in Bangui and attacks against peacekeepers, combined with increasingly frequent and intense clashes between armed groups outside the capital.

12. Between September and November, 53,000 persons were displaced during clashes between FPRC and UPC in Bria and between ex-Séléka and anti-balaka groups in Kaga Bandoro. Such violence was often triggered by power struggles within and among armed groups and by attempts to control resource-rich areas and seasonal migratory movements. Moreover, armed groups exploited intercommunal

tensions, especially in the centre of the country, exacerbating communal rifts and often setting back nascent reconciliation efforts.

13. The security situation in Bangui deteriorated in October following the killing of a Central African soldier in the third district on 4 October. The killing, in the predominantly Muslim neighbourhood of PK5, triggered retaliatory killings of 3 ethnic Fulani and the disappearance of 14 civilians by presumed uncontrolled Central African soldiers, members of self-defence groups and unknown perpetrators, leaving more than 11 individuals from both communities dead. MINUSCA extracted more than 135 Muslims stranded in hostile parts of the capital, undertook patrols in coordination with the national security forces and established static posts in strategic locations, which contributed to calming the situation.

14. On 24 October, a civil society leader, Gervais Lakosso, led violent demonstrations in Bangui to call for the departure of MINUSCA, the lifting of the United Nations arms embargo and the redeployment of the national armed forces. The demonstrations were organized with support from some political actors and armed elements. Demonstrators erected barricades and stoned United Nations and non-governmental organization vehicles. Gunfire and grenade explosions killed four persons. United Nations staff movements were restricted for 48 hours while MINUSCA dismantled barricades and secured strategic areas. In a separate incident on 30 October, the leaders of two self-defence groups in the PK5 neighbourhood, Abdoul Danda and Issa Kapi (alias "50/50"), were killed in violence between the two groups.

15. In the north-west, criminal activity increased as a result of competition between armed groups for the control of seasonal migration activities and the cattle market, thereby exacerbating the humanitarian situation and stalling development initiatives. The 3R group repeatedly clashed with anti-balaka elements around Bocaranga, Koui and Ndim in Ouham-Pendé prefecture. In response, MINUSCA strengthened its presence in Bocaranga and Koui in late September. On 13 October, anti-balaka elements fired on MINUSCA peacekeepers in Makounzi Wali, 20 km south of Koui, and stole ammunition, fuel and money. Also in Ouham-Pendé and Ouham prefectures, tensions rose between MPC, aligned with the Révolution et justice group, and anti-balaka-affiliated groups, culminating in violent clashes between 11 and 13 November in the areas of Bozoum, Gouzé and Paoua, forcing inhabitants of 25 villages to flee. On 5 January, suspected anti-balaka elements attacked a MINUSCA convoy escorting United Nations military observers in Ouham-Pendé prefecture, killing a peacekeeper.

16. Violence between ex-Séléka and anti-balaka factions continued in the central part of the country. The killing of an ex-Séléka element on 12 October in Kaga Bandoro triggered a revenge attack on a camp for internally displaced persons and violent retaliation against predominantly Christian neighbourhoods by several hundred ex-Séléka elements, leaving at least 38 civilians and 12 ex-Séléka fighters dead. Several houses belonging to United Nations national staff and the local authorities were set ablaze and at least two offices of international non-governmental organizations and the parish were looted. Some 19,000 civilians sought refuge near the MINUSCA base and the airfield. Since then, the situation has remained tense, although the number of internally displaced persons has fallen slightly.

17. Tensions rose between UPC and anti-balaka factions in Ouaka prefecture. On 28 October, in the village of Bélénguo, alleged UPC elements killed six gendarmes who were investigating unrelated crimes attributed to armed groups. Anti-balaka elements shot at MINUSCA peacekeepers along the Bambari-Grimari-Sibut and Sibut-Dekoa routes on eight separate occasions, injuring nine peacekeepers.

18. FPRC elements attacked UPC positions in Bria on 21 November, largely in response to UPC expansion into FPRC areas of control, competition over natural resources and the UPC refusal to join a reunified ex-Séléka movement. The initial FPRC attack against the Fulani neighbourhood of Gobolo and reprisal attacks in Bria left 93 dead, while some 13,000 civilians were displaced. On 24 November, MINUSCA positioned its forces to prevent further FPRC attacks on the neighbourhood, while FPRC insisted on the full withdrawal of UPC from Bria before reducing its own presence. FPRC exacerbated tensions by employing rhetoric casting itself as a Central African group and UPC as comprising foreign elements.

19. FPRC also forged opportunistic alliances with MPC and anti-balaka elements to attack UPC positions close to the UPC stronghold of Bambari. Between 30 November and 10 December, control of the town of Bakala, located north of Bambari along the route to Mbrès, changed hands twice between FPRC and UPC. The town is currently controlled by FPRC. The provisional casualty figures from the fighting, which are difficult to verify, indicate that 6 civilians, 95 elements of the FPRC coalition and 32 UPC elements were killed and 19 civilians, 38 elements of the FPRC coalition and 17 UPC elements were injured. MINUSCA took measures to protect civilians in Bambari, including Fulani civilians and Muslim displaced persons in the Christian neighbourhood that had been targeted, as well as to detect and respond to the risk of violent conflict in the environs of the town. MINUSCA also strongly warned both parties of the repercussions of any attempts to destabilize Bambari and its environs, stressing its determination to use force to protect civilians.

20. In the east of the country, unidentified assailants attacked a MINUSCA-escorted fuel convoy in Haut-Mbomou prefecture on 3 January, killing two peacekeepers and injuring two others. The overall number of incidents attributed to the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) was 22 attacks and 101 civilians abducted. Some were attributed to the Doctor Achaye splinter group that allegedly operates outside the control of the LRA leader, Joseph Kony. An increase in LRA activity is foreseen until the end of the dry season in March and in the light of the reduced presence of the Ugandan military in Nzako and Sam Ouandja, where LRA has taken over vacated bases. Uganda has expressed its intention to withdraw its forces operating in the Central African Republic under the auspices of the African Union Regional Task Force, although the timeline therefor remains unknown.

C. Reconciliation

21. A national programme for reconciliation and social cohesion was adopted on 4 November. It provides strategic guidance in areas such as social cohesion, transitional justice, dialogue with armed groups and the return and reintegration of internally displaced persons and refugees. On 21 December, the President officially launched local peace and reconciliation committees as part of the infrastructure for peace. Elected by local communities, the committees are expected to solve local

conflicts and promote peace through mediation and dialogue. The Government plans to establish such committees in all 16 prefectures in 2017.

22. In the aftermath of the violence in Kaga Bandoro on 12 October, the ad hoc local peace committee helped to ease tensions by obtaining the commitment of anti-balaka and ex-Séléka elements to allowing freedom of movement for the population. Meanwhile, a symbolic reconciliation ceremony between Christians and Muslims was held during a mass on 11 December at the Bangui stadium in honour of the recently nominated Cardinal of Bangui. The Muslim cemetery in Bangui, which had reopened in February 2016 and then closed again after the tensions in October, reopened on 13 December.

III. Progress in implementing resolution 2301 (2016)

23. In line with the priorities identified in resolution 2301 (2016), MINUSCA reviewed its mission concept to ensure coherence and unity of efforts. It also began to realign its military and police posture and deployments to enhance mobility and responsiveness, including by reducing the number of temporary operating bases and generating company-size reserve capacity in each sector to complement airborne and motorized reserves. In Sector West, the initial realignment of the Mission's deployment contributed to greater control over the movement of armed groups in Ouham-Pendé and Nana-Mambéré prefectures. In Bangui, MINUSCA began the progressive transfer of static guard duties to the national police and the gendarmerie in December, handing over security for six national institutions. Moreover, following the unrest in Bangui and the provinces in September and October, MINUSCA and the national authorities established two mechanisms to enhance the sharing and coordination of information between the Mission and the national defence and internal security forces.

24. MINUSCA increased its use of strategic communications, including through its Guira FM radio station, which has nationwide coverage. It also held 25 public information events involving more than 25,000 people, including representatives of local authorities, armed groups, political parties and women's and youth organizations and religious leaders, to promote peaceful coexistence.

A. Immediate priorities

Protection of civilians

25. The Mission's proactive deployments and posture, coupled with enhanced integrated operational planning and coordination mechanisms, helped to prevent or mitigate the impact of violence on civilians. Improved crisis management mechanisms helped the Mission to maximize its protection efforts, for example by guiding the location of checkpoints, buffer zones and areas of active patrolling during clashes between the FPRC coalition and UPC in Bria. This helped to contain the violence and enabled humanitarian actors to address the needs of the most vulnerable.

26. In support of efforts to reduce violence associated with seasonal migration, the Government, with the assistance of the United Nations and non-governmental partners, developed an operational plan and established local committees to prevent

conflicts in traditional flashpoint areas in Bamingui-Bangoran, Nana-Mambéré and Ouham prefectures. Since December, the MINUSCA force has conducted long-range patrols along migratory corridors and maintained a presence in key hotspots.

27. A total of 23 joint protection teams were deployed to develop protection plans in response to alerts received, mostly pertaining to violence associated with seasonal migration or armed group activities. MINUSCA also provided training on protection of civilians to incoming members of the military and police components. The Mission, through the Mine Action Service, addressed risks posed by unexploded ordnance by disposing of 122,430 rounds of ammunition and explosive devices in populated areas and providing risk education to 99,810 beneficiaries.

Promoting and protecting human rights and international humanitarian law

28. MINUSCA documented 582 incidents of violations of human rights and international humanitarian law committed against 872 victims, comprising 548 men, 117 women, 92 children and another 115 victims whose age and sex could not be verified. Arbitrary killings, cruel, inhumane and degrading treatment, arbitrary arrests and detentions and abductions constituted most of the abuses. The following armed groups were allegedly responsible for 283 cases of abuse: anti-balaka (61), ex-Séléka factions (189), LRA (16), Révolution et justice (12) and 3R (5). The fighting between the FPRC-led coalition and UPC in Bria and in Ouaka prefecture resulted in a spike in the number of civilian deaths. The Mission received reports that both groups committed targeted killings of civilians suspected of collaboration with the opposing group. The national security forces were attributed with responsibility for 184 human rights violations, half of which were instances of arbitrary and/or prolonged detention committed by the Investigation and Intelligence Service of the gendarmerie (53) and by other units of the gendarmerie (40).

29. MINUSCA and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights mapped the most serious violations of international human rights and humanitarian law committed since 1 January 2003 to inform efforts to combat impunity, including the work of the Special Criminal Court and the development of a transitional justice strategy. In parallel, on 14 December, MINUSCA published its second periodic report on the human rights situation, covering the period from 1 June 2015 to 31 March 2016.

30. The United Nations system continued to apply the United Nations human rights due diligence policy. Of 29 requests for support to non-United Nations security forces, 22 were approved, with the necessary risk mitigation measures recommended when appropriate.

31. MINUSCA conducted 12 human rights awareness training sessions for 760 government and civil society participants (256 women and 504 men) and for at least 100 elements from UPC, FPRC and the anti-balaka.

Conflict-related sexual violence

32. MINUSCA received 42 reports of conflict-related sexual violence, involving 25 women and 17 girls. Of those cases, 35 involved rape and 7 attempted rape and sexual assault. Of the 35 incidents of rape, 11 were committed by more than one perpetrator. Of the 42 cases, 32 involved ex-Séléka elements, 4 armed Fulani

herders, 2 anti-balaka elements and 4 persons of unclear affiliation. The Mission is investigating additional reports of alleged sexual and gender-based violence committed during the violence in Kaga Bandoro in October, after which 32 victims received assistance from humanitarian partners.

33. The Government appointed 29 national police officers and gendarmes and two medical and two social affairs officers to a new specialized national police unit tasked with tackling violence against women and children. MINUSCA, the Team of Experts on the Rule of Law and Sexual Violence in Conflict and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) supported training for the unit on investigative techniques.

Children and armed conflict

34. The country task force on monitoring and reporting continued to verify grave violations and abuses committed against children by armed groups. Fifteen children were killed in the fighting in Kaga Bandoro, Bria and the Bambari area, marking a sharp increase compared with the previous reporting period. In total, 14 children were maimed, 12 girls raped, 20 children abducted and three hospitals and 10 schools occupied and looted. A total of 14 children escaped from LRA. The period saw a significant increase in the killings of children, escapes from LRA and incidents targeting humanitarian workers.

35. MINUSCA continued to engage with armed groups and civil society to separate children from armed groups and to reduce their vulnerability to recruitment. Those efforts saw anti-balaka groups hand over 1,085 children to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). No children were released by ex-Séléka groups, largely owing to renewed fighting among them. MINUSCA facilitated the end of the four-month occupation by the Front démocratique du peuple centrafricain of the Zoukombo school in Nana-Mambéré prefecture on 3 October. Advocacy efforts by MINUSCA and UNICEF resulted in armed groups vacating schools in Bakala, Bodjomo, Mbrès and Morouba.

B. Sustainably reducing the presence of, and the threat posed by, armed groups

Support for reconciliation and the extension of State authority

36. MINUSCA continued its good offices to build trust among all stakeholders and to encourage the Government to assume full responsibility for the peace process. It focused on promoting and supporting government-led dialogue along three tracks: armed groups, Central Africans at the local and national levels, and neighbouring countries.

37. Following the President's visit to Kaga Bandoro on 17 October, my Deputy Special Representative and a delegation comprising four government ministers visited Koui and Bocaranga in December to address violence relating to the seasonal migration. Also in December, MINUSCA facilitated the efforts of eight parliamentarians to deal with local conflicts and violence in their respective constituencies.

38. With support from the Peacebuilding Fund and the United Nations Population Fund, the Mission and UNDP rehabilitated public infrastructure in remote areas, together with two maternity clinics in Nana-Grébizi and Ouaham-Pendé prefectures. MINUSCA and UNICEF continued to support the redeployment of teachers to remote areas. While the deterioration of the security situation slowed down the redeployment of magistrates outside Bangui, MINUSCA trained and provided technical advice to court personnel and magistrates in Bangui. In December, MINUSCA launched training for 245 local chiefs in Bangui to promote resilience and reconciliation. The Mission and the United Nations country team, with support from the Peacebuilding Fund, also assisted local authorities in Bangui, Bambari, Bouar, Bria and Kaga Bandoro in implementing income-generating activities combined with awareness-raising activities on peaceful coexistence for more than 13,000 Christian and Muslim young people.

Support for disarmament, demobilization, reintegration and repatriation

39. MINUSCA facilitated the first three meetings of the Consultative Follow-up Committee on Disarmament, Demobilization, Reintegration and Repatriation. Following the adoption of the national strategy, the Committee discussed the implementation of the associated programme, including the integration of eligible former combatants into the national uniformed services.

40. MINUSCA continued to implement pre-disarmament, demobilization, reintegration and repatriation and community violence reduction programmes to draw elements away from armed groups and reduce intercommunal tensions. A total of 4,279 combatants (3,545 men and 734 women) are participating in related activities in eight locations, involving cash-for-work activities, vocational training, food distribution and weekly awareness-raising activities. Combatants who rejoin hostilities are excluded.

41. The community violence project in Paoua, Ouham-Pendé prefecture, implemented by MINUSCA in partnership with the International Organization for Migration, engages 6,340 beneficiaries of the 7,000 targeted, comprising 4,486 members of armed groups and 1,854 community members, among whom 1,139 are women. The community violence reduction programme in Bangui, launched by MINUSCA with the United Nations Office for Project Services on 28 November to provide vocational training, has thus far engaged 543 beneficiaries, among whom 40 are women, of the 3,000 targeted.

Support for security sector reform

42. MINUSCA continued to provide strategic and technical guidance to the national committee responsible for drafting the national security sector reform strategy on the basis of the national security policy adopted in November. The first part of the World Bank-led public expenditure review of the public financial management of security institutions was finalized in December.

43. On 23 December, the European Union Military Training Mission concluded the operational training of the first infantry company, comprising 175 soldiers. MINUSCA completed the rehabilitation of the classrooms and barracks at Camp Kassai in Bangui and the construction of 10 armouries, in addition to the retraining of 54 non-commissioned officers and the training of 28 soldiers. The verification

and registration of members of the military were put on hold by the national authorities.

44. MINUSCA supported efforts to implement the capacity-building and development plan for the police and the gendarmerie (see para. 6 above). It assisted the authorities in developing a nationwide outreach campaign and communications strategy for the selection and recruitment of 250 police officers and 250 gendarmes during the first half of 2017. The Ministry of the Interior, supported by MINUSCA, UNDP and the Peacebuilding Fund, verified and registered 71 gendarmes and 315 police officers, with 1,945 gendarmes and 1,469 police officers registered thus far. MINUSCA and UNDP continued to support the rehabilitation of the police academy and deployed a specialized police team to build national forensic capacity.

Support for the rule of law and efforts to combat impunity, including through the operationalization of the Special Criminal Court

45. To support the rule of law and combat impunity, MINUSCA provided technical assistance, capacity-building and support to make the Special Criminal Court operational. In addition, it apprehended 84 alleged perpetrators, 18 of whom under its urgent temporary measures mandate.

46. Some decisions, including those resulting in the release of high-profile suspects such as Aubin Yanoué and Jonathan Fabrice, made in September by the Criminal Court in Bangui raised concerns over the impartiality and capacity of ordinary courts to try serious crimes. MINUSCA continued to provide advice on continuing investigations into more than 20 people allegedly involved in serious crimes, including the presumed organizers of the violence of 24 October in Bangui and the former Minister of Defence, Jean-Francis Bozizé.

47. Significant progress was made in making the Special Criminal Court operational, with support from MINUSCA and UNDP, including within the framework of the Global Focal Point for Police, Justice and Corrections Areas in the Rule of Law in Post-Conflict and Other Crisis Situations, and bilateral partners. The terms of reference for national magistrates were published on 9 December. A selection committee for international members of the Court, established by my Special Representative, is about to complete the selection of the Special Prosecutor and other international magistrates. The Government designated a building for the Court and another for judicial police officers, while MINUSCA developed a security plan for the personnel and premises. The decree establishing the selection committee for judicial police officers was finalized in November and is pending approval by the national authorities. While full funding for the Court's first 14 months of operations has nearly been secured, a gap remains for its entire five-year mandate.

48. More than 1,560 civil cases were adjudicated by mobile courts in Bouar with the support of UNDP and MINUSCA. The second criminal session since 2015 was organized in Bangui with the support of UNDP and MINUSCA, during which 52 files involving 95 indictees were adjudicated. Three cases of sexual violence were tried as rape and convictions pronounced.

49. MINUSCA and UNDP refurbished prisons in Bangassou, Berberati, Bimbo and Ngaragba, including the Camp de Roux annex, between September 2015 and

the end of the reporting period. Central African soldiers continued to provide security at eight prisons, including Ngaragba and Camp de Roux in Bangui. MINUSCA and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime are supporting a plan to demilitarize the prisons. Government-provided corrections personnel are deployed in nine locations to support the national prison administration through capacity-building projects. A total of 60 such personnel are deployed to Camp de Roux and Ngaragba to actively support the management of prison incidents. In some areas, suspected criminals are released after being held briefly by internal security forces as a result of an ineffective criminal justice system. Armed groups often implement parallel justice systems in areas that they control.

Natural resources management

50. The national authorities, with MINUSCA support, are developing a strategy to curb the illicit exploitation of and trafficking in natural resources. The Kimberley Process expanded the compliant zones for diamond trading to Boda, Carnot and Nola in Berberati prefecture. The national authorities, with MINUSCA support, also visited key mining areas and sites in Bambari, Bria, Dimbi, Ndélé, Nzacko and Sam Ouandja to review the implementation of requirements under the Process, in the hope that additional areas will be declared free of conflict and illicit trafficking and that there will be a sufficient presence of State authority to ensure that diamond revenues are not being channelled into the hands of armed groups.

C. Coordination of international assistance and the Mutual Engagement Framework

51. The institutional architecture for the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the Mutual Engagement Framework and the National Recovery and Peacebuilding Plan was set out in a presidential decree of 5 November. An advisory council will serve as the forum for high-level dialogue and policy discussions between national and international partners on critical aspects of both.

52. The United Nations, the European Union and the World Bank supported the Government in developing the National Recovery and Peacebuilding Plan, while harmonizing humanitarian and development funding to ensure complementarity. Through extensive consultations, including with 720 women and youth civil society leaders, the Plan identified three pillars: promoting peace, security and reconciliation; renewing the social contract between the State and the population; and facilitating economic recovery.

IV. Humanitarian situation

53. The humanitarian situation further deteriorated during the reporting period. Half of the estimated 4.6 million Central Africans remain dependent on humanitarian assistance. The number of internally displaced persons increased by 18 per cent, to a total of 411,785. The number of refugees in neighbouring countries remains unchanged at 474,848. Some 2 million people face extreme food insecurity, a significant increase from the 1.4 million in 2014. In Bangui, humanitarian partners supported a government-led plan for the return of 28,000 internally displaced

persons at the M'Poko airport site, resulting in some 15,000 having returned to their places of origin (mainly Bangui) by 13 January. Insecurity in LRA-affected areas and access challenges prompted the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees to relocate the Bambouti refugee camp, which hosts 5,000 South Sudanese refugees, to Obo, Haut-Mbomou prefecture. Humanitarian access continues to be reduced in many areas. International non-governmental organizations have at times had to temporarily relocate non-critical staff from Bambari, Batangafo, Bria and Kaga Bandoro to Bangui, restricting activities in those regions only to lifesaving interventions.

54. The needs of Central Africans and funding levels remain inversely correlated: the Humanitarian Response Plan for 2016 garnered only 36 per cent of the $532 million necessary. The lack of funding has forced some humanitarian organizations to leave the country, while others are reducing their geographical coverage, the significantly increased humanitarian needs notwithstanding. Consequently, as at November 2016, thousands of displaced people were living off a quarter of the standard food rations. Without increased funding, food assistance to 150,000 people will no longer be provided from February, affecting the 700,000 people reliant on World Food Programme assistance. On 13 January, the President personally appealed for food aid support.

55. The Humanitarian Response Plan for 2017, amounting to $399.5 million, was launched by the United Nations Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator, alongside the Minister for Social Affairs and National Reconciliation, on 21 November in Geneva. The Inter-Agency Standing Committee Emergency Directors Group and regional United Nations Development Group team conducted a joint visit to the country from 4 to 6 December during which they advocated greater funding, enhanced protection of civilians and unimpeded humanitarian access.

V. Socioeconomic developments

56. Economic growth slowed to 4.5 per cent in 2016, below the 5.2 per cent projected, as a result of insecurity. The estimated inflation rate of 5.1 per cent is notably higher than earlier projections, largely owing to the rising prices of staples. On 30 September, the National Assembly adopted a supplemental budget to raise national revenue collection, clear wage and pension arrears and build a budgetary reserve for 2017 to mitigate the volatility of foreign aid. In December, the International Monetary Fund approved the disbursement of $16.8 million under the framework of the Extended Credit Facility.

VI. Electoral needs assessment

57. Pursuant to resolution 2301 (2016), an electoral needs assessment mission was deployed to Bangui from 14 to 28 October to assess, among other things, the prevailing environment, the legal and institutional framework governing the electoral process and the capacity and needs of the National Electoral Authority and the various electoral stakeholders, with a view to making recommendations on possible electoral support to be provided by the United Nations.

58. During its assessment, the mission consulted a broad array of national and international stakeholders, during which key national stakeholders clearly conveyed their will to hold local elections as soon as possible. The mission concluded that the holding of local elections and broader decentralization could contribute to attaining the strategic objective of MINUSCA and reinforce other peacebuilding processes. Likewise, progress regarding dialogue and reconciliation, disarmament, security sector and justice reform, the extension of State authority and the return of internally displaced persons and refugees would enhance the creation of an environment conducive for the holding of inclusive local elections that would contribute to sustaining peace. For this purpose, local elections and decentralization reform should form an integral part of the broader peacebuilding processes.

59. The mission found that the national authorities and electoral bodies faced technical and financial challenges that would require continued support from the international community, including to strengthen the capacity of the National Electoral Authority and to support the eventual holding of local elections. The mission identified the following areas requiring continued United Nations technical and advisory support: development of the legal framework, information technology, civic and voter education, training, operations and logistics, communications and external relations. Given that the electoral calendar has not yet been promulgated and security challenges persist, the mission recommended that the United Nations should provide electoral assistance in phases.

60. The first phase (until 30 June 2017) would be focused on political support and technical assistance aimed at strengthening the strategic and operational planning capacities of the National Electoral Authority. Together with UNDP, MINUSCA would continue to use its political engagement and good offices to promote credible elections, while providing institutional and capacity-building support to the Authority to develop, among other things, an electoral timeline, a realistic electoral budget, a voter registration strategy, a detailed logistics plan, a comprehensive external relations strategy, including voter information and public outreach campaigns, and consultative mechanisms with electoral stakeholders. MINUSCA would also advise relevant authorities on electoral reforms. This would require no change to its mandate, but it would need the resources necessary to provide such support. The second phase would involve supporting the relevant national authorities in the implementation of the various plans, in particular technical, logistical and security, beginning with the establishment of the electoral calendar. The mission also recommended that the previous United Nations internal coordination mechanism for electoral assistance to the national authorities under the authority of my Special Representative should be maintained.

VII. Deployment of the Mission

A. Military

61. As at 15 January, MINUSCA had deployed 10,370 military personnel (96.5 per cent of the authorized strength of 10,750), comprising 11 infantry battalions, a special forces company and several enabling units, including a military police unit, four engineering companies, a heavy transport company, three level II hospitals,

three signal companies and three helicopter units, including a combat helicopter unit. Women comprised 1.5 per cent of military personnel. The deployment of a quick reaction force company began on 9 January, while efforts to generate an additional engineering company and an unmanned aerial vehicle unit are continuing. Troop-contributing countries continued to improve the equipment of their respective contingents.

B. Police

62. As at 15 January, MINUSCA had deployed 1,710 police personnel (82.2 per cent of the authorized strength of 2,080), comprising 316 individual police officers (79 per cent of the authorized strength of 400), eight formed police units and two protection support units comprising 1,394 personnel (82.9 per cent of the authorized strength of 1,680), including 148 women. A total of 78 individual police officers were deployed in 10 locations outside Bangui, while of the eight formed police units one was in Bouar and another in Kaga Bandoro. Detachments of formed police units were temporarily deployed in Bria and Kaga Bandoro in October and November. Women constitute 8.66 per cent of the overall number of police personnel.

C. Civilian personnel

63. As at 15 January, MINUSCA had deployed 1,241 civilian personnel (72 per cent of the authorized staffing), comprising 611 international and 427 national staff members and 203 United Nations Volunteers. This includes the net increase of 129 positions authorized for 2016/17. Women constitute 25 per cent of civilian personnel deployed and 22 per cent of personnel holding a senior position at the P-5 level or above.

D. Status-of-forces agreement

64. The Government made efforts to resolve outstanding issues pertaining to the status-of-forces agreement, including by confirming the fuel tax exemption for 2017. The Mission's advocacy efforts notwithstanding, differences in the interpretation of article 65 of the agreement, which incorporates the privileges and immunities of United Nations funds and programmes in the country, and additional issues relating to the agreement remain outstanding, including reimbursement of fuel taxes already paid, annual registration fees on residential leases and taxes on MINUSCA personnel leaving the country with their pay and emoluments.

VIII. Safety and security of United Nations staff

65. United Nations civilian and uniformed personnel continued to face threats from crime, social disturbances and armed conflict. There were 86 security incidents affecting 110 civilian personnel, including 22 international and 38 national staff members who were relocated from Bambari and Bria to Bangui owing to fighting among ex-Séléka factions. Three peacekeepers were killed in action and 14 wounded. There were 36 incidents involving humanitarian organizations. During the

demonstrations in Bangui on 24 October, five international civilian personnel had their residences burgled by armed assailants.

IX. Serious misconduct, including sexual exploitation and abuse

66. The number of allegations of serious misconduct fell in comparison with the previous reporting period. As at 30 November, the number of allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse had fallen from 16 in the previous period to 6, while other types of serious misconduct fell from 10 to zero.

67. A trained immediate response team member conducted fact-finding missions and gathered evidence within 72 hours of the five more recent allegations reported. It remains difficult to provide assistance to alleged victims of sexual exploitation and abuse owing to the lack of international and State service providers. In December, in close collaboration with the respective police- and troop-contributing countries concerned, the Office of Internal Oversight Services completed its investigation into multiple allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse in Dekoa, Kémo prefecture. The reports of the Office's investigations were shared with the troop-contributing countries to complete their own investigations and take appropriate disciplinary or criminal accountability measures, as warranted. Individuals found to have engaged in sexual exploitation or sexual abuse are prohibited from participating in future peacekeeping operations.

68. MINUSCA is implementing a new abuse action plan that defines the roles and responsibilities of its sections and United Nations partners in prevention, response and capacity-building in relation to sexual exploitation and abuse. The Mission has also developed a tracking matrix to identify gaps in victim assistance.

X. Financial aspects

69. The General Assembly, by its resolution 70/271, appropriated the amount of $920.7 million for the maintenance of the Mission for the period from 1 July 2016 to 30 June 2017. As at 5 January 2017, unpaid assessed contributions to the special account for MINUSCA amounted to $243.6 million. Total outstanding assessed contributions for all peacekeeping operations as at that date amounted to $1,801.7 million. Troop and formed police costs have been reimbursed. Reimbursements of contingent-owned equipment have also been up to 30 September 2016, in accordance with the quarterly payment schedule.

XI. Observations

70. Developments over the past four months in the Central African Republic reflect the fact that, even though the conclusion of the political transition has generated positive momentum, the country continues to face significant challenges. The mobilization of the international community at the Brussels Conference represented a strong expression of international solidarity. The adoption of key reform plans on areas such as the security sector, disarmament, demobilization and reintegration and gender parity, coupled with progress in making the Special

Criminal Court operational, reconfirmed the commitment of the Central African authorities to moving forward. Nevertheless, the soaring violence since the end of the rainy season stands as a stark reminder of the limits of State authority and the destructive role that armed groups continue to play in the country. Without improved security and tangible progress in tackling the root causes of the conflict, the risk that the fragile gains made thus far will be reversed remains all too real.

71. The fighting between two ex-Séléka armed groups, FPRC and UPC, must end. These senseless clashes, driven by power struggles and competition for resources, are taking a disproportionate toll on civilians. I deplore all attacks against civilians, the widespread abuses and violations of human rights and the looting of humanitarian premises. Both parties must immediately lay down their weapons and enter into a genuine process of disarmament and political dialogue to restore peace. MINUSCA will make full use of its capacities to protect civilians and prevent the continuation of this fighting. I call upon regional leaders and institutions with the power to influence armed groups to persuade them to lay down their weapons and immediately join the framework for dialogue established by the President.

72. I am outraged by the continued attacks on peacekeepers who are deployed in the country to serve the people and help them to find a path to peace and stability. I strongly condemn attacks against and the killing of United Nations peacekeepers, which may constitute war crimes, and call for the perpetrators to be held accountable.

73. The end of the political transition generated popular hope for change and high expectations for stability and recovery. I commend the President for his commitment to bringing about lasting peace. I urge him and his Government to continue to fulfil the promises made to the public in his inaugural speech, the Mutual Engagement Framework and the National Recovery and Peacebuilding Plan. With limited capacity to project State authority and provide tangible benefits to the population in the short term, the Government must continue to call for peace and inclusive dialogue while steadfastly advancing governance reforms and pursuing reconciliation. I urge all government institutions to work collaboratively towards the implementation of the recommendations made during the Bangui Forum on National Reconciliation, including the negotiation of a new social pact to bind the country together. This effort, which is aimed at fostering national cohesion, will require deeper grass-roots contacts with all citizens.

74. I applaud the continued commitment of the President to advancing the government-led dialogue with the armed groups. The United Nations will continue to support the dialogue. The agreement reached with 12 of the main 14 armed groups on the disarmament, demobilization, reintegration and repatriation strategy is of critical importance. There should not, however, be any illusion that disarmament, demobilization, reintegration and repatriation will be a panacea to advance peace and to address the deep and legitimate grievances of all communities. I urge the Government to proceed expeditiously in broadening the dialogue with the armed groups, including by exploring options for integration into the security sector and participation in the Administration, as well as by considering interim security arrangements, without which disarmament may fail.

75. A broadened dialogue must, however, refrain from offering amnesty for war crimes, crimes against humanity and other gross violations of human rights. Such a

blanket amnesty would perpetuate impunity and undermine the desire for justice expressed at the Bangui Forum. I welcome the engagement of the African Union, ECCAS and other partners in promoting mediation initiatives. It is essential that all such efforts be aimed at strengthening the legitimate authorities and the government-led peace process by bringing into their fold those armed groups that remain outside it. The leaders of the subregion are called upon to support the President's efforts in the interests of longer-term peace and security along their shared borders.

76. Advancing security sector reform is an essential prerequisite for addressing the root causes of the conflict. I welcome the progress in this regard through the adoption of a national security policy and the successful training by the European Union Military Training Mission of a Central African infantry company. It is essential that the conversion of the new security policy into a national strategy be subject to wide consultations with all stakeholders. This national strategy will also need to include specific steps to establish professional, ethnically representative and regionally balanced national defence and internal security forces, beginning with the upcoming recruitment of police officers and gendarmes and the training of new military units. MINUSCA will collaborate with the European Union in support of national efforts to ensure that the training of the Central African military takes the stabilization and reconciliation agenda forward. The Government is called upon to ensure that the process of certifying members of the armed forces continues unhindered. The President's approval of the five-year capacity-building and development plan for the police and the gendarmerie is an important first step. As the lead actor on the reform of the police and the gendarmerie, MINUSCA will support efforts to recruit, train and deploy at least 500 gendarmes and police officers. It will be important for international partners to support security sector reform in a coordinated manner.

77. I am encouraged by the progress achieved towards making the Special Criminal Court operational. Less encouraging, however, are the setbacks in the restoration of the rule of law and the national judicial system, which has been greatly disrupted by the recent violence. We must remain resolute in our efforts to combat impunity, including through the establishment of a national programme for the protection of victims and witnesses, together with a legal aid system. I urge the development of a comprehensive national transitional justice strategy to tackle human rights violations and abuses, both past and present. Further steps to strengthen the independence of the judiciary are needed, and work to advance the demilitarization of the prison service must continue.

78. Building a sense of shared belonging among Central Africans is a multifaceted undertaking that requires the Government's long-term commitment and investment. Reconciliation must be actively pursued and nurtured. I welcome the adoption of the national reconciliation strategy. Its implementation will require dedicated leadership and it will play an essential role in the country's stability and prosperity, including in the safe return of the displaced and refugees. All initiatives undertaken by parliamentarians in support of national dialogue and reconciliation are welcome. I urge them to continue to improve the legislative framework defining the roles and responsibilities of citizens, together with the institutional capacity to enforce equal protection under the law. In this regard, the National Assembly is called upon to

support reconciliation efforts by taking up the bills to establish Muslim holidays, as recommended at the Bangui Forum, and a new iteration of the Nationality Code.

79. The Brussels Conference of 17 November resulted in pledges of more than $2.2 billion. This demonstration of solidarity embodies the commitment of the international community to learning from the lessons of the past and not disengaging prematurely. I urge international partners to honour their commitments, lest efforts to sustain peace falter. The subregion is encouraged to continue to play a constructive role by collaborating to tackle common security issues, including those relating to armed groups, seasonal migration, arms trafficking and the smuggling of natural resources.

80. The Government must accord priority to efforts to equitably meet the urgent needs of the population through the provision of public goods and services. I urge it to take steps to respond to the needs of young people to obtain an education and employment as a bulwark against association with armed groups and falling into crime. Tangible results in these areas will contribute substantially to the mutually reinforcing dynamic of peace and development. Needs are immense and expectations must be managed, but progress is possible. I stress the importance of avoiding the appearance and practice of corruption, and urge the Government to hold individuals accountable for plundering public resources, including those pledged by donors for the welfare of the population. The Government and international partners must make full use of the Mutual Engagement Framework and the National Recovery and Peacebuilding Plan follow-up mechanisms to foster progress in these areas, including to focus on the key priorities where the limited capacities of the State can be strengthened.

81. I am deeply concerned by the deteriorating humanitarian situation. The lack of funding for the humanitarian response risks bringing essential humanitarian activities to a near halt in the coming weeks. To avoid a further exacerbation of the situation, which could also undermine peace efforts, the international community is urged to contribute urgently and generously to the Humanitarian Response Plan.

82. I am grateful to my Special Representative for the Central African Republic and Head of MINUSCA, Parfait Onanga-Anyanga, for his unwavering dedication and leadership. I am deeply appreciative of the work of the personnel of MINUSCA and the United Nations country team in a demanding environment. I am also grateful to my Acting Special Representative for Central Africa and Head of the United Nations Regional Office for Central Africa, François Louncény Fall, for his role in the subregion in support of the Central African Republic. I thank the African Union, troop- and police-contributing countries, ECCAS, the European Union, the World Bank, international partners and multilateral and non-governmental organizations for their continued efforts to work with the Central Africans towards a better future.

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